

LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

Vol. 7

Spring 1955

No. 3

LABOR'S USE OF THE LIBRARY

The use of the library by labor grew out of the Washington meeting of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups in late 1954 where union representatives agreed that it was time for labor to express its interest, need and appreciation in library service.

THE MACHINISTS' UNION AND THE LIBRARIES

By J. William O'Connell
Assistant Director of Education
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The public library has been an integral part of the educational program of the International Association of Machinists since the inception of that program six years ago.

The Machinists' educational program is essentially a field program with Educational Director Tom Tippet and an assistant setting up and conducting training institutes at the local level. Each institute is tailored to meet the interests and requirements of the local group, and the subjects, beyond such basic material as labor history, are concerned with the technical functions of the local lodge, its officers and its stewards.

Because of the large number of locals in the Machinists' Union (nearly 2000), each training institute must serve not only as a training project, but also as an introduction to the ways and means of a continuing educational program at the lodge level.

The first series of training institutes, undertaken in the winter and the spring of 1949, differed from subsequent institutes only in that it was conducted for the full-time, paid field staff of the Union. There still existed the need for sowing the seeds of a continuing interest in educational activity in order that the methods and subjects developed at the institutes could be further developed by the Grand Lodge Representatives and Business Representatives for use by the local lodges.

One of the primary purposes of this first series of institutes was to acquaint the "students" with resources available in each community which might be used in developing continuing educational programs.

Early in the planning of the first series of institutes, it was decided that the public library in each community constituted one of the most valuable local resources. Here the education-bent Machinist could find information on labor history, economics, parliamentary law, and other sources of "technical" information. Here he could also find the type of business and economic material which would assist him in the day-to-day work of organizing and negotiating.

It was the latter use which appealed most strongly to the full-time union representatives who attended the first series of institutes, but there is no doubt that they were also infected with the broader purposes which the library can serve.

Our first series of institutes covered twenty cities in the United States and three in Canada. In nearly every one of the twenty-three cities, we found the librarians most cooperative and ready to assist us. The name and address of the local library, plus a listing of books available on the general subject of labor, became an integral part of the summary which was prepared after each institute.

A number of highlights of our first contact with the libraries as aids in labor education still stand out in our minds.

There was the librarian in Jamestown, New York, who discovered that one of the local union officials was a member of the city council and was serving on the subcommittee for the library. He, on his part, was surprised to find that the library contained a small, but growing, collection of labor books. Whether the association which the two established at the training institute bore fruit, we do not know, for the librarian left Jamestown a few months later for another city.

There was the librarian in Kansas City, Missouri, who professed ignorance on the general subject of labor, but announced that she was in charge of the business service and said "if you want to know how much profit your boss made last year, come over and I'll help you find out." Every business representative in the class made a note of her name and location in the library.

And there was the attractive young red-head in Des Moines, who completely demolished any preconceived notions the union men may have had of librarians, when, after the Educational Director had told her how competent a group of men she faced, she commented, "Well, I don't know about that, but they certainly are the best looking group of men I've seen in a long time."

Seriously, looking at this first experience in retrospect, we must conclude that the primary value of bringing libraries into our educational program in its early stages was to help break down the natural reserve of the union officials and the librarians toward each other. And this has served as a valuable base for our subsequent educational programs.

Today, as six years ago, the local public library is an essential part of any Machinists' training institute. In several cities, where there have been a series of institutes, there is an established and valuable degree of cooperation between the union and the library.

The Pacific Northwest offers two examples of excellent cooperation. In the fall of 1950, in Portland, Oregon, we took a financial secretary of one of the local lodges to the library to give him first-hand experience in the use of its facilities. His lodge was in the midst of wage negotiations, and as we encountered the librarian, she was busy working over the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumers Price Index figures for Portland. The figures, as she was developing them, were just what the lodge needed in its negotiations, and the financial secretary became a constant visitor to the library. Presumably, he is "spreading the gospel" now throughout his area of the country because he since has become a traveling auditor for the International.

Last fall a librarian in Seattle, Washington, put on a demonstration of library services before a large group of shop stewards from the Machinists at Boeing Aircraft which Educational Director Tom Tippet describes as one of the best he has ever seen. With the aid of an assistant and an extensive collection of books and pamphlets on economic and labor subjects, the librarian gave on-the-spot answers to requests for information put to her by stewards and union officials. The union men and women who witnessed the demonstration have a new idea as to the extent and availabilities of library services.

Beyond our own direct experience, we know from reports that some of our local lodges work rather closely with libraries in such cities as Milwaukee and New York.

We still have far to go on both sides before the Machinists' Union will be making the fullest possible use of library services and facilities although cooperation is growing constantly. With the early labor movement in America having played so important a part in the establishment of our system of public libraries, it is regrettable that understanding and appreciation has developed so slowly between these two great forces for good in our national life.

We look forward to the day, and we are striving constantly to bring it about in our union, when labor unions will be among the libraries' most active users, and the libraries, on their part, will have the support of unions in developing their services to labor and to the whole community.

LIBRARY PARTICIPATION IN WORKERS' EDUCATION

By Tom Cosgrove
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A successful experiment in library participation in workers' education programs was conducted recently by the Textile Workers Union of America, CIO.

The union's education department, which services locals in 33 states, wrote to eight eastern seaboard city libraries asking their participation in scheduled institutes.

Some libraries did not reply, but four did participate in varying degrees. These included the North Adams (Mass.) Public Library, Adams (Mass.) Free Public Library, Holyoke (Mass.) Public Library and the Dalton (Ga.) Regional Library. While experiences were valuable, the Holyoke and Dalton contacts were most useful to the union.

Both the Holyoke and the Dalton libraries cooperated in steward training programs directed at local union officers responsible for enforcing union-management contracts. Both provided exhibits of books and periodicals on labor and other subjects of interest to the group. For instance, in Dalton where many mill workers are also part-time farmers, books on poultry raising were shown.

It is interesting to note that both librarians were able to select material of interest to the classes although neither had previous labor contacts or any prior experience with union programs.

Both librarians also addressed the students. At the Holyoke class, Gilbert C. Rich briefly described the general services of the library and went into some detail on material of special interest to labor. Members of the class were surprised and pleased to find that the library was wellstocked with information about local industry. They were most impressed by the fact that the library had reports on the financial status, including the profits, of the firms for which they worked.

In Dalton, librarian Frances Gish gave a similar talk, adding that the library had access to a large store of free films and could lend a 16mm projector free of charge. TWUA's Dalton locals cannot afford to buy projectors but expressed great interest in using this one to increase interest in membership meetings.

Miss Gish had time to "sit" in on class discussion of grievance problems and found it interesting. She invited the class to join the American Heritage discussion group which meets at the library. She also watched "Freedom to Read" with the class and participated in discussion following the showing, throwing considerable light on the principles which guide librarians in the purchase of books.

All four experiences have proven to the union that librarians are willing and able to help workers as an important community group. Contacts were established between the local unions and the libraries which will lead to more library use and perhaps even more organized cooperation. For example, a tour of the Holyoke library is being planned for textile unionists in that area.

Though many students signed up for library cards at the time, the entire experience does not prove that workers will rush for the material about their unions and their industries. However, the textile workers education department is satisfied that the experiment has been worth doing and plans to seek library participation in all future local institutes.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE AFL

By John E. Cosgrove
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The increasing service to workers by public libraries is most encouraging. While in the past, workers have not taken proportionately full advantage of libraries, as compared to other groups, progress is now being made in remedying this condition. Through the efforts of the American Library Association's Joint

Committee on Library Service to Labor, more and more union members are now being served realistically by the library system.

Workers need the libraries both as individuals and as members of trade unions. Today's national unions, made up of the local unions in each community, are interested in civil defense and civil rights, parliamentary procedure and world affairs, labor laws and social security laws, consumer guidance and public relations. Unions take part in community projects, workers' education, public health and governmental affairs. Their interests are broad and as they increase, their need for expert library assistance is greater than ever before.

Fortunately, a great deal is being done in some places to serve organized labor. Successful programs of various kinds are underway in Akron, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, New York and Newark to mention a few.

The extensive and successful scholarship program of the Massachusetts Federation of Labor, under the Director of Education, Francis Lavigne, has had important assistance from the libraries in that state. They assist high school students in locating material on the labor movement, in preparation for the scholarship examinations. This is a particularly fruitful area for library-labor cooperation since many AFL organizations offer such awards in many states and cities.

Another important service to trade unions can come where State Federations of Labor have active education departments, such as in Alabama, Connecticut, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Texas and West Virginia, particularly. In Massachusetts, Libraries establish useful exhibits at educational conferences, institutes and conventions. At a recent meeting of the AFL education and research directors in Boston, the Boston Public Library set up an impressive display of labor material, demonstrating what the Boston Library does for locals in its area.

There are a great many ways in which libraries can be of service to unions. Deposits of books in union halls, where these can be serviced, would encourage reading. Book lists, reviews, and articles in local labor newspapers can acquaint workers with available material; book lists sent to unions directly in a library "labor newsletter" are of value. Labor shelves in libraries are most useful in stimulating interest.

Among the most important needs of local unions is their use of statistical and economic information for collective bargaining. Otto Pragan, director of education for the AFL Chemical Workers Union, cited the Akron Public Library as a typical source of such material, adding that the Akron Library had useful information on "cost of living indices, job classifications, workmens' compensation problems, legal decisions, grievance procedures, wage rates, histories and financial reports of corporations, pension-plans, unemployment insurance, health plans, wage clauses, how to edit a local paper, how to train new local officers" and other valuable material.

Many of the great national and international unions within the AFL have had fine experiences in working with libraries. Among these is the International Association of Machinists. Director of Education, Tom Tippet, of the IAM reports that his union consistently includes the local librarian in the steward schools and other projects of their "field" educational program. The IAM introduces the librarians, asks them to explain their services and urges key officials

in local lodges to visit their libraries. Librarians may attend these schools and give demonstrations of library service. The IAM includes the names and addresses of the local librarians in its lesson plans.

Unhappily for some labor organizations, cooperation is not always forthcoming from librarians. One State Federation of Labor education director wrote the librarians in 100 libraries of his state urging consideration of a Labor Day display, and sending, with the request, selected labor materials. Not one of the 100 librarians responded, probably because they did not understand the possibilities of serving labor.

It is likewise true that union leaders are uncooperative. In such cases, if the librarians can determine the needs of labor unions in their communities and meet them practically, labor will respond satisfactorily.

Where librarians are themselves members of unions, the problems of "contact" and "acceptance" are readily solved. Where they are not, a proper approach is necessary.

All State Federations and most central bodies and large locals have full-time officer-representatives and Education Committees which welcome aid from libraries. If contacts can be made with these groups, more real progress can be expected.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR GROUPS MID-WINTER MEETING

The Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups met at a luncheon meeting at the Edgewater Beach Hotel on Wednesday, February 2nd with Mrs. Dorothy Kuhn Oko, chairman, presiding.

Plans for the Summer Conference in Philadelphia were discussed. It was decided that the services of the committee should be offered to Mr. Mumford at the General Meeting at which there is to be a labor speaker. Cooperating with Tom Cosgrove of the Textile Workers Union and a member of the Joint Committee in the training institute he is planning for union members during the summer session was presented. It was decided that unless a similar AFL program could be arranged the committee should not sponsor the CIO education program but should merely assume responsibility for publicizing it and distributing tickets for it. It was also decided that the committee plan an open meeting at which current issues confronting labor, of which librarians should be aware, be presented by two trade union men; this to be followed by an informal discussion and by a tea or smoker. The committee agreed that an exhibit booth should be planned for the summer conference.

Chairman Oko reported that progress was being made on the Handbook, and that it had been approved officially by the Editorial Board with the provision that the Board see the manuscript before they agree to publish it.

The plan evolved at the special Washington, D.C. meeting in November of appointing representatives from the AFL and the CIO to work with librarians in key cities was explained and suggestions were made for places where this plan could be especially effective.

It was reported that the January and March issues of Radio Spot announcements are carrying labor announcements resulting from Irwin Sexton's suggestions. Joe Mire of the AFSC&ME agreed to supply further announcements to Len Arnold.

Margaret Mary McGuire of the Minneapolis Public Library gave her consent to taking over the editorship of the Newsletter to replace the retiring editor, Ralph McCoy. Plans for future issues were outlined.

The committee gave its approval to the letter sent by chairman Dorothy Oko to the Committee on Development of Library Standards.

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This newsletter is issued by the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups of the American Library Association, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups.

Contributions of news and articles are welcomed by the editor.